Reproducing advantage: the perspective of English school-leavers on studying abroad

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ABSTRACT. This paper presents results of a questionnaire survey of 1400 Year 13 (final-year) school and sixth-form pupils in two contrasting areas of England, which asked them about their thoughts and plans to study at university abroad. Key questions which the survey sought to answer were the following. How many and what proportion of all higher education (HE) applicants, apply, or consider applying, to university outside the UK? What are their reasons for doing so? What are their distinguishing characteristics as regards type of school (state vs. private), academic record, parental socio-occupational background, and prior contacts abroad? The questionnaire data were supported, but occasionally contradicted, by interviews with school staff members responsible for coordinating and advising on the HE application process. Approximately 3 per cent of pupils apply to study abroad (most also apply to UK universities) and another 10 per cent consider applying but do not do so. North America, Australia and Ireland are favoured destinations; not mainland, non-English-speaking Europe. Quality of university and desire for adventure are the most important motivations. Decisions to apply abroad are strongly correlated to the academic results of pupils (the best apply), to prior connections abroad (travel, holidays, residence abroad etc.) and to a range of overlapping indicators of parental wealth and social class. The theoretical and policy implications of the research are also considered. Study abroad creates an 'elite within an elite' and works against government agendas of widening participation. On the other hand, English students' foreign experience potentially enhances their interculturalism and graduate labour market competitiveness.

How many UK students apply to do their first degree at a foreign university? Where are they interested in studying? What are their reasons for wanting to study abroad? And what are their, and their families' distinguishing socio-economic and demographic characteristics?

These questions are interesting from a number of government-policy, economic, geographical and sociological perspectives. The UK government sees the issue as relevant for two main reasons. First, because students studying abroad are 'lost' from the HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) database, used to measure governmental aspirations to have 40 rising to 50 per cent of the age cohort of young adults involved in higher education. If this leakage abroad is sizeable, the government's ability to claim target achievement is compromised. Second, there is the question of the *quality* of those students who decide to study abroad. Are they the 'brightest and best'? In other words, is there a possible 'brain drain' effect, reminiscent of the original coinage of the term when British scientists moved to North America in the 1960s? (Adams 1968; Glaser 1978). This links clearly to the economic dimension of the debate, which has two sides. One is the classic brain drain mechanism whereby a proportion, small but significant, of clever young people are 'lost' to other countries. The other side of the coin is the beneficial effect of the return of this human capital with enhanced academic, intercultural and perhaps linguistic skills, to enrich the strength of the British graduate labour market.

Geographically and sociologically, the point in young people's lives where they 'go away to uni' is of strategic interest (Holdsworth 2009). It represents a first detachment from the parental family and household and the onset of independent living at a transition-to-adulthood age of the late teens (Mulder and Clark 2002). Spatially it gives rise to important, yet surprisingly under-researched, migration patterns, both within the country and, the more specific focus of this paper, abroad. Of course, by no means all entrants to higher education (HE) leave home at this time. With widening participation's recruitment of 'non-traditional' students and with imposition of student fees, more and more UK students choose (or have no choice but) to live at home (Christie 2007); and indeed living at home has always accounted for a larger share of the student population in some parts of the UK (notably Scotland and Northern Ireland) than others. But those who apply to study abroad are in truth an unknown quantity and an under-researched component of the spatial, educational and life-style transition from school or sixth-form college to HE.

This paper presents the results of what we believe is the first-ever survey of UK (specifically, English) students' applications to HE abroad. It is part of a broader research project commissioned by Department of Business, Innovation and Skills into the 'Motivations and Experiences of UK Students Studying Abroad'.[1] This wider project had three main components:

- a critical review of statistics on UK student migration (the 'Metadata Survey');
- a questionnaire survey of the HE application intentions of 1400 final-year pupils in schools in two regions of England (the 'School Survey');
- a questionnaire survey of 560 UK students currently enrolled for degree programmes at universities abroad (the 'Student Survey').

This paper deals with the second of these surveys, but we also draw briefly on supporting evidence from other two surveys where appropriate, and from key interviews with school staff.

The paper develops as follows. In the following section we locate the School Survey within the evolving literature on student migration/mobility, in order to be specific about the research questions addressed in this paper. The next section deals with research design and methods. The core of the paper presents findings: sample characteristics; results of questions pertaining to the key dependant variable – propensity to apply to study abroad, and where; and cross-tabulations with various independent variables – school type, academic performance, education and socio-occupational background of parents, demographic characteristics, and personal and family links abroad. The concluding discussion interprets the findings in the light of two analytical lenses: the relationship between social class reproduction and higher education; and the emergence of a global hierarchy of countries and universities in an increasingly internationalised HE system.

Framing the study

We position this paper within the evolving literature on international student migration (ISM). This literature is growing quite fast, albeit from a small base. Much of what has been written so far frames ISM as part of a multi-billion dollar global industry in which the main student flows are from developing countries, above all nowadays China and India, and the main destinations are the United States, the United Kingdom and other highly developed countries with well-regarded HE systems and institutions (for overviews see de Wit 2008a;

Gürüz 2008; IOM 2008: 105-125). Conceptually, these writings generally focus around notions of the globalisation of higher education, brain drain, human capital formation and return vs. non-return. Less attention has been paid to ISM *between* advanced countries, the main exception being a number of studies of short-term student exchanges such as the European 'Erasmus' programme or the North American 'junior year abroad'. However, these are more properly defined as student *mobility* rather than student migration.[2] A distinction thus needs to be made between two types of student movement abroad:

- *credit mobility*, whereby students go abroad for part of their study programme, typically for a semester or a year, and then return to their home university to complete their programme of study, bringing the 'credit' from their study abroad with them;
- *degree mobility*, also known as diploma or programme mobility, where students migrate for the entire duration of their programme of study, which might be just one year in the case of a taught master's degree, or three or four years if the degree is a bachelor's or doctorate.

This paper is about the latter form, and specifically on out-moving UK students at first-degree level.

As the Metadata Survey reveals, the existing statistical basis for estimating UK student outward mobility is decidedly shaky, but nevertheless provide some useful insights.[3] The first thing to note is that the UK is primarily a destination for ISM (second in the world after the US) rather than an origin (here it ranks 22nd). According to the OECD (2008), the UK had 22,405 students studying abroad in 2006-07; however the 'best estimate' of Findlay and King (2010:16) revises this down to 20,473. These figures equate to, respectively, 1.9 and 1.7 per cent of all UK-domiciled students in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). According, again, to Findlay and King's best estimates (2010:15), the main destination countries for UK ISM are the United States (8,438, 41.2%), Ireland (2,282, 11.1%, but four out of ten are from Northern Ireland), Australia (1,783, 8.7%) and France (1,620, 7.9%). Trends over the past decade have generally been upwards for the USA, Ireland, Australia, Canada and New Zealand; downward for the main continental European destinations such as France and Germany. Over the longer term, 1975 to 2006, based on OECD figures, the UK's ISM total grew by 33 per cent from 16,866 to 22,405, a rate far lower than the overall rate of growth in UK student numbers over this period.

Theoretically, ISM may be set within several conceptual frameworks. We highlight four.

- First we can envisage students as a subgroup of *highly skilled migration within a globalised economy*. This theoretical lens incorporates the brain drain framework between countries of unequal development, the notion of ISM as an apprenticeship for a professional career as a highly skilled migrant, and from the point of view of the host country, the use of ISM as a means of recruiting talented individuals into key high-skilled sectors of the labour market after graduation (Findlay 2001; Hawthorne 2008; Hugo 2006).
- Second, we see student mobility as part of the *globalisation of higher education.* National HE systems are increasingly being harmonised around internationally defined standards. Transnational political frameworks and agendas – notably the project of European integration – shape opportunities for curricular compatibility (the 'Bologna process') and encourage student exchanges under the well-known Socrates-Erasmus scheme (Altbach and Teichler 2001; de Wit 2008b; Kuptsch 2006; Kwiek 2001; Varghese 2008).
- The notion of *youth mobility cultures* – embracing travel and living abroad as an act of consumption and a rite of passage for young people – provides a third theoretical strand framing ISM. Linked to this is Murphy-Lejeune's (2003) concept of *mobility capital* and the persuasive arguments of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) about the creation of individualised biographies, comprising an 'intercultural lifeworld' within global modernity.
- Fourth, we draw attention to the way in which ISM is embedded within structures of *social class reproduction and elite formation*. Existing survey literature such as the Euro Student 2000 report (Schnitzer and Zempel-Gino 2002) finds convincing evidence that students who study abroad are disproportionally (compared to all students) drawn from high-income families. In this frame of analysis, we see, within the general symbiosis between social divisions and educational divisions, a distinguishing role for ISM, creating an elite within an elite, reinforcing social class boundaries and creating and maintaining an international capitalist class (Sklair 2001).

Given the nature of the survey data presented in this paper, we privilege the fourth approach above, aiming to build on existing empirical investigations both of credit mobility (Findlay et

al. 2006) and of degree mobility (Brooks and Waters 2009a; Waters and Brooks 2010) which likewise demonstrate a strong social-class component to the way in which ISM is structured and experienced.

Methods

Two research instruments were deployed to gather data to respond to the questions posed at the start of this article: a schools-based questionnaire to 1400 final-year pupils who were applying to university; and a series of interviews with key informants in most of the schools and colleges surveyed (n=15).

The questionnaire survey was administered via a stratified sample design, equally divided (700 each) between two city-regions of England, between state and independent/private schools and between males and females. The two areas chosen were Brighton and Sussex in the South of England, and Leicester and Leicestershire in the Midlands, both areas consisting of one medium-sized city and a constellation of surrounding smaller towns and rural districts. Brighton/Sussex was deemed representative of the more affluent non-metropolitan South East, with a predominantly White population; Leicester(shire) of the Midlands and North of England, with their heritage of industrial employment and postwar immigration, in Leicester's case predominantly from the Indian subcontinent.

Within each area, a mix of schools was selected to cover the state and independent sectors; city, suburban and small-town locations; and mixed and single-sex schools. Our 'target' list had seven schools in each area. A 'reserve' list was used when our target schools declined to cooperate (three instances) and as a means to top-up quota samples where sixth forms were small. Questionnaires were filled in on hard copy, either in special sessions arranged by the schools or disseminated via tutor groups. The questionnaire took around 15-20 minutes to complete. The survey period was October 2008 to February 2009, corresponding to the university application period for Year 13 pupils. Only those applying to university were asked to complete the survey.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections and involved mainly simple-to-answer, closed questions, with a few spaces for elaboration where it was thought necessary or useful. Section 1 documents the respondent's current studies – A levels taken, plus other qualifications. Section 2 records past studies – mainly GCSE grades. Section 3 asks the

important questions about plans to study at university, including universities applied for. This section poses the key question which is the dependent variable: are respondents applying to study abroad, if so where, and have they ever considered studying abroad, even if in the end they are not applying. Section 4 asks about pupils' previous links outside the UK (travel, holidays, residence abroad). Section 5 collects general demographic data, both for respondents and their parents, including the education and occupations of the latter.

Our second research instrument consisted of key-informant interviews with 15 individuals, usually the head of sixth-form, HE advisor or other such strategic person with close knowledge of pupils' HE applications. These interviews lasted between 20 minutes and one hour, were recorded (permission sought and granted in all cases) and subsequently transcribed. In order to respect ethical guidelines, we do not name interviewees or schools. We refer to the interviewees as L1, L2 etc. for Leicester, and S1, S2 etc. for Sussex. These interviews yielded valuable insights, based on the often long experience staff had of monitoring HE applications over many years. Even so, some discordances were found with the questionnaire results, as we shall see.

Results

Our findings are sequenced to answer two sets of research questions. First, what proportions of school-leavers are applying, or considered applying, to study abroad, in which countries, and why? Second, what socio-demographics and educational characteristics affect the likelihood of final-year pupils considering and activating the study abroad option? Amongst the independent variables we consider are region, school type (state vs. private), academic performance, gender, ethnicity, parental education and socio-occupational class, and personal/family links abroad. Throughout the analysis we mix questionnaire results with quotes from interviews.

At this point we need to spell out two critical points about the tabulations of the questionnaire results which follow. The dependent variable is the response to the question 'have you thought of applying to a non-UK university?' Three response categories are possible: 'Yes, and I am applying'; 'Yes, but in the end I decided not to apply'; and 'No'. Whilst the first and third answers are simple enough, the second comprises a range of reactions from serious considerations and exploration of options to study abroad, to a passing whim or thought. Hence, we pin more of our analysis on the first of the three answers, since this reflects committed action.

The second refinement concerns the distinction between what we henceforth define as the 'standard' and the 'narrow' samples. The former case refers to the entire sample (n=1400), the latter only to UK-domiciled, UK-national pupils (n=1241). The difference between the two is made up of pupils who are foreign nationals sent to England, mainly to boarding schools, in order to access British secondary and, probably, higher education.[4] Although such pupils are often aiming at the top British universities, they are also much more likely than UK nationals to consider applying to universities abroad as well. The distinction between these two samples is quite important, and reflects two different departure-points for analysis: on the one hand the perspective of the general Year 13 school population applying to HE (standard sample), on the other the specifically UK/English dimension of this process (narrow sample).

How many, what proportions, and where?

Let us start with the staff interviews. All 15 replied that going abroad to university was a very small-scale phenomenon. Some seemed surprised that we were even asking the question about study abroad, and struggled to think of anyone from their school who had actually gone. Here, first, are two answers from staff in large sixth-form colleges, one in Leicester and one in Sussex

> ...what I can say straightaway is that there are very, very few students [who apply to university abroad]...I think there can't be more than the odd one or two in let's say a period of ten years...it's a very small number (L7).

> The answer is that there are hardly any. I can't remember the last time we had an application to an overseas institution...it's so rare you would notice it (S7).

The situation was little different in the independent day-pupil schools:

> I would say that it is extremely small...We have one or two pupils with an Irish background who look to the Irish universities but as yet I am not aware that any have actually gone. I usually get one or two enquires every year about American universities, but again it doesn't materialise (L2).

Only in the independent-sector boarding schools did interviewees yield more extensive information, usually stressing the link to the overseas pupils or to the international character of the school:

> OK, the general profile is that there are relatively few students that go to overseas universities. There are usually half a dozen a year that express an interest in American universities. Last year we had someone go to McGill, that was partly because he had Canadian connections. This year we have somebody...who is half-Australian anyway, and he is going to go to university in Australia (L4).

> We've had a fair number...I would say five or six every year to the United States and we have had girls go to Australia and Canada. I think it is partly the students we have; they are very international. So the idea of going abroad is already part of their make-up. The American universities are obviously the second choice...not the second choice but the alternative to the UK universities. [As for European universities] very few, hardly any I think (S1).

The general impression from the interviews is one of minimal scale movement, endorsed by statements such as 'one or two', 'hardly any', 'less than one per cent' etc. The questionnaire results, however, reveal a somewhat different picture.

Table 1 displays the full set of responses to the key question about applying to university abroad, for both the standard and the narrow samples, by geographical area, and by type of school. Four features can be highlighted from this table. First, looking at the 'total' figures at the foot of the table, there is a big difference between those who merely thought about applying abroad, and those who are actually applying. Taking the narrow sample, the ratio is four to one; for the standard sample, about three to one.

Second, the proportions replying 'Yes' are much lower for the narrow sample than they are for the standard sample. These inter-sample differences are much greater for the first of the two positive answers (the 'pro-active' one; 7.2% against 4.0%) than they are for the second answer (13.0% vs. 12.4%).

Third, moving to the top segment of the table, pupils from the Brighton/Sussex schools are more oriented to studying abroad than those from Leicester(shire). Taking the standard sample, twice as many Sussex respondents were applying abroad than Leicester respondents (67 vs. 34, or 1 in 10 compared to 1 in 20). The inter-area differences attenuate, but remain noticeable, when we look at the other 'Yes' answer ('thought about applying but did not') and when we shift across to the narrow sample. The explanation for the inter-area

difference is likely to be twofold: the different social class (and ethnic) composition of the two areas; and (for the standard sample) the higher number of foreign students in Sussex schools.

Fourth, the differences in response patterns are even more marked when we examine the state vs. independent sector divide. We already noticed evidence of this when interviewing staff members in the two school types; the questionnaire data give quantitative credence to these impressions. For respondents applying abroad in the standard sample, the rate for independent schools is four times that of the state sector. Moving across to the narrow sample, where the non-UK pupils, who are far more numerous in private schools, are filtered out, the differential narrows to a ratio of two to one (5.5% vs. 2.8%). For the second-variant 'yes' answer, the inter-sector differences reduce to ratios where the independent-sector responses are about 50 per cent higher than those for the state schools.

Even on the basis of the narrow sample, the percentages applying abroad – 4.0 per cent overall – and contemplating applying but not doing so – 12.4 per cent – are considerably higher than the key interviewees were suggesting. Why this discrepancy? We suggest three possible factors. First, many teachers were more focused on the relatively few cases of (former) pupils who had already gone to study abroad, whereas the questionnaire respondents were at a more speculative stage of their decision-making, with no certainty that they would actually go. Second, applications might be made without the school staff knowing. The teachers and advisors are mostly responsible for managing the UCAS system of applying to UK HEIs. Pupils might be working with their parents, friends or private tutors to make applications abroad, unbeknownst to their schools and sixth-form colleges. This was borne out in many of the interviews carried out for the Student Survey, where respondents stated that they applied to university abroad without any help from their schools, or without their schools' knowledge. Third, pupils may have inserted a positive answer to the 'study abroad' question on the mistaken assumption that this could also mean applying for UK degrees with a year or semester at a foreign university. The questionnaire was absolutely clear that this was not what was being asked, but we cannot discount the possibility of a misunderstanding on the part of some respondents.

We are unable to gauge the precise relevance of the three factors discussed above, but it is our considered opinion that the main reason is the second one – namely that teachers do not necessarily know what is happening with non-UK applications.

Table 1 does not give us the final word on numbers and proportions applying, or considering, to study abroad, since the overall figures reflect the artificial weight (50 per cent) applied to the independent sector. Taking the narrow sample as the key measure, if we re-weight the state-sector percentages (2.8% applying, 10.2% considering applying) and the independent-sector proportions (5.5% and 14.9%) by their real shares of Year 13 pupils in England (89% in state schools, 11% in private), the overall figures become 3.1 per cent applying to study abroad and 10.7 per cent who consider doing so but do not go ahead. This translates, in terms of absolute numbers, to approximately 5,000 and 15,700 pupils respectively for England as a whole.[5] These estimates give us fairly definite answers to the first research question: How many and what proportion apply abroad?

Next question: which countries are the preferred destinations? Table 2 gives the answers. In the narrow sample, more than half opted for the USA, followed at some distance by Australia, Ireland and Canada. These four anglophone countries account for four out of the five destinations considered.[6] The standard sample figures are broadly similar but also reflect the tendency of some respondents (for instance from Hong Kong, Singapore and Germany) to apply to their home-country universities, perhaps as an insurance against not getting accepted at a 'good' British university. Notable also, for both samples, is the weak orientation to European universities, except Ireland.

Finally, in this first-stage analysis, what are the main motivations for studying at university abroad? For the answer to this question we turn to the Student Survey – an online survey administered to UK-national students in several countries of the world (for details, Findlay and King 2010: 27-32). Of the 560 responses, just over 500 were from the USA, Australia and Ireland. Part of the questionnaire asked respondents to rate six possible motivations as either 'very important', 'slightly important', 'not important' or 'not applicable'. These reasons were nominated partly on the basis of our previous experience of researching ISM, and partly to provide insights into the theoretical perspectives reviewed earlier. The three factors which dominated response patterns were the desire to attend a *world-class university*, study abroad as a step towards an *international career*, and the idea of studying abroad as a *unique adventure*. All these are clear 'pull factors' geared to a combination of academic, professional and personal development. The three 'push factors' on the list – *limited places* in the UK, UK *student fees*, and *parental encouragement* – were deemed of lesser importance.

Socio-demographic, educational and personal factors affecting orientation to study abroad

We now move to the second-stage analysis, which examines academic performance, demographic factors, parental social and educational background, and personal/family connections abroad.

Relationships between academic performance and propensity to apply to university abroad obviously play into concerns about brain drain. The simple question we test here is 'Are the best pupils more likely to apply to study abroad?' The pupil questionnaire contained the relevant data on academic grades: actual GCSE grades obtained, and actual and predicted A-Level results.[7] We divided A-Level results into three bands: 3 As or better, 3 Bs or better (but excluding 3As), and outcomes below this. Likewise, GCSE results were split three ways: 7 or more A and A* grades, 7 or more of B or better, and lesser outcomes. On both counts, the results show that the academic high-flyers (those with topmost grades) are more than twice as likely to apply abroad compared to the two lower ranks of performance (Table 3). For A-Levels, there is an additional tendency for the lowest performers to be somewhat more likely to apply abroad than the middle category: this may be evidence of a 'hedging bets' or 'second choice' strategy (cf. Brooks and Waters 2009b) for those who fear they may not be able to get into a (good) UK university.

The hypothesis that the 'academic cream' of English schools are the most interested in applying abroad is also statistically tested by Table 3. For this exercise, we collapse the 'study abroad' responses to just two: 'applying' and 'not applying' (the latter including the reply 'thought about applying but did not apply'). The results are significant in all cases, with higher levels of significance for the standard sample.

A second angle on the correlation between academic attainment and orientation to non-UK universities is given by looking at the pattern of applications to UK universities of those who are applying abroad. Here we follow the same tabulation form and testing as Table 3, but the independent variable this time is whether the pupils had put at least three of the UK's 'top ten' universities on their UCAS form.[8] From Table 4 we can see that those who had applied to the 'best' UK universities were around three times as likely to apply abroad compared to those aiming for a less ambitious mix of UK HEIs – highly statistically significant.

We next move to the standard demographic characteristics of the pupil sample, reflecting the common reference to these variables, including gender, age and ethnicity, in much literature which seeks to understand migration behaviour (Boyle et al. 1998: 105-127). We discount age as this is uniform across the sample. The School Survey showed that more girls than boys applied to study abroad (60 vs. 41 in the standard sample, 27 vs. 23 in the narrow one) or considered applying but did not do so (103 vs. 79, 85 vs. 68), but these differences are not statistically significant. This 'insignificant' majority of females contrasts with research on credit mobility – for example with the Erasmus programme – where female mobility rates are much higher than male rates, largely on account of the greater preponderance of female students taking language courses abroad as part of their UK-based language degrees (Findlay et al. 2006: 303).

Much the same story holds for ethnicity: some small differences between different ethnic-origin categories, but not statistically significant (for the tabulation see Findlay and King 2010: 72). This again differs from credit mobility where it is shown that 'White' ethnicities (specifically 'White UK/Irish' and 'White European') have higher mobility rates than other ethnic categories – South Asian, Black Caribbean, Chinese etc. (Findlay et al. 2006: 303).

The ethnic dimension is another area where the questionnaire results disagree with remarks from the key interviews. All of the interviewees from the Leicester day-pupil schools commented on the tendency of Asian families to keep their sons and especially their daughters at home, even when applying to UK universities.[9] Here is a typical interview clip:

> The ethnic mix of the school would be...I think 1 in 4 of our pupils are from the...they are English but they are first or second [sic: he means second or third] generations...their families are originally from the Asian subcontinent [...] One observation I would think about our Asian students is...I have to be careful not to over-generalise...but a lot of them don't want to venture that far from home. So a lot of Leicester University applications would be from the Asian community, so they would stay in the parental home...(L3)

We feel that this represents a stereotype which, whilst perhaps true of some sections of the Asian community, is no longer valid as a generalisation. We make this assertion based on two sets of arguments. First, the Asian community has been well-established in Leicester since the 1960s, so that many university applications are third-generation, not the children of

recent immigrants. Second, the Asian 'community' is in fact made up of several communities, marked by different national origins (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Uganda etc.), different regional origins within these countries (especially India), different religions and languages etc. Especially for those whose background is in business and the professions (Ugandan Asians and Sikhs, amongst others), the orientation to academic achievement and 'Western' values is high.

We now move to an exploration of the relationship between parents' socio-economic status and their offspring's likelihood of applying to university aboard. This connection has solid theoretical and empirical foundations in the literature, both in the UK and internationally. Taking first the broader international literature, the foundational studies of Bourdieu (1986, 1996; also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) established the notion of 'educational habitus' and the intergenerational transfer of cultural and educational capital via membership of elite schools and universities. This link between the social reproduction of business elites and elite education was demonstrated by Hartmann (2000) for France and Germany. Meanwhile Waters (2006) has shown how Hong Kong families' migration to Canada has enabled the accumulation of cultural and educational capital and hence the reproduction and enhancement of class divides based on transnational social networks.

Regarding the British case, the statistical linking of the Erasmus and HESA datasets demonstrated not only that a preponderance of credit-mobile students were female and white, but also that their parents were of higher social class and more likely to be university-educated themselves (HEFCE 2004: 81-90). Other UK research has convincingly exposed the strong influence that social class has in terms of access to higher education. Recent reports sponsored by the Sutton Trust on intergenerational mobility and access to HE in the UK find no evidence of improvement; moreover the UK remains socially immobile intergenerationally when compared to other advanced nations (Blanden and Machin 2008). Ermisch and Del Bono (2010) found that England was significantly behind similar nations in creating equality of opportunity for achieving good exam results for pupils from the least well-educated families. This achievement gap remains much higher than in comparator countries (the USA, Canada, Gemany) and is largely to be explained by highly educated parents ensuring their children had places at independent schools or top-performing state schools which had better resources and intake.

What do our School Survey data tell us about the link between parental background and international orientation? We measure this by two indicators: parental education (whether both, one or neither parents had university education), and parental socio-occupational class. Table 5 sets out the data for these two measures, according to the now-familiar format. For education, pupils with both parents university-educated were more than twice as likely as those with neither to be applying to study abroad. Moving to occupations, the situation is very similar, although for the narrow sample the threshold of statistical significance is not reached, probably due to the collapse of different occupational categories, a necessary process in order to achieve cell counts of sufficient size to run the test. To be more specific, the third category of occupations comprises sales, clerical, administrative, manual and 'other' workers, where 'other' is itself a heterogeneous category including retired, unemployed, housewife/househusband, students and armed forces.[10] Nevertheless, we feel that the evidence of Table 5 is sufficiently consistent to suggest that parental educational and occupational status, which comprise both financial and cultural capital, together correlate clearly with pupils' propensity to apply to study abroad.

The final set of hypothesised factors for pupils who are applying or who considered applying abroad are what might be generically called network and information factors – personal, family and school links, including prior mobility history. Again, these derive from standard migration theory (Boyle et al. 1998: 62, 75-77). Several such variables are generated from the questionnaire survey, and there is the more impressionistic, but often equally revealing, evidence from the staff interviews. We examine the questionnaire data first.

Table 6 selects five indicators and sets them out in one table. We do this because the patterns are fairly consistent across the indicators, if not always statistically very robust, and in order to avoid too much detailed and repetitive description of results. On this table we give the full 'raw' data, with both the standard and the narrow sample (the latter in brackets); the percentages are based on the standard sample. Putting the two samples side by side enables the variable difference between them to be seen at a glance. Unlike the previous three tables, we include here all three possible responses to the dependent-variable question.

The first segment of the table looks at whether parents have ever lived abroad for more than six months. A positive relationship is evident only for the first column: 'Yes and applying'. Second, regarding family holiday patterns, the relationship is clearer: pupils who are widely travelled (7+ countries visited) are almost twice as likely to consider studying

abroad, and to apply, compared to those who have visited none or one. The third section of the table relates to personal contacts and exhibits the most contrasting response pattern of all the five variables. We see that pupils who know someone who is studying, or has studied, abroad (es. family or close friends) are much more likely to consider studying, and especially to apply to study, in a non-UK university compared to those without such personal links. The final two parts of Table 6 look at school-based dimensions of these factors. Those who have been on a school trip abroad are almost twice as likely to apply abroad as those who have not. And those who have received information about foreign universities within the school/college context (and sometimes direct help in applying too) are again twice as likely to apply abroad.

The overall message of Table 6 is that 'network' factors are indeed important but three other interpretive remarks are in order. First, the picture is somewhat complicated by pupils of immigrant and refugee background, for whom prior residence and travel abroad may have more to do with family history and transnational behaviour than with the kind of more cosmopolitan experience that logically might lead to an interest in studying in, say, North America, Australia or Europe. Second, the differences in frequencies between the two samples should be kept in mind. In most cases the general relationship is evident for both samples, but the contrast between the independent-variable frequencies is sharper for the standard version. The final observation is that many of the factors measured in Table 6 are expressions of socio-structural processes already commented on earlier in the paper, notably the occupational (and therefore the wealth) background of the parents and the type of school. To cite one example, school exchanges, culture tours or sports trips are far more frequent in the independent sector schools, where parents are more likely to be able to afford such educational 'add-ons'. The following two staff interview extracts illustrate this contrast. The first is from an independent day/boarding school, the latter from an inner-city state sixth-form college:

> If I look back to the summer, we had a group that went out to Nepal...a mixture of hiking and community service. Our sports people toured. Our musicians went to South America...(L5)

> There is one exchange link that was set up in 2001, a school in [names town in US]. We have taken three groups of students...to give them an experience of education in a different environment. But it is becoming increasingly difficult to stump up the money...[At the beginning] we did it with the 'Excellence in

> Cities' money, which helped us provide grants to attend the programme. That doesn't exist any more, and we are asking £400-500 which is just beyond what the majority can afford (L7).

Concluding discussion

This paper represents the first large-scale attempt to survey UK school-leavers' attitudes towards pursuing HE abroad. It is of direct policy relevance to governmental debates about increasing both inward and outward mobility of students, notably the second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI 2, announced by PM Blair in 2006) which broadened the purely income-generating approach of PMI 1 (1999) to a more internationalist philosophy (Gürüz 2008: 192-195). Our paper also informs target-based concerns about measuring the numbers and proportions of UK school-leavers who enter HE by identifying the small component who apply abroad.

At a different level, the paper contributes to the still-small geographical and sociological literature on student migration, recognising the essential character of student mobility as spatial, life-stage and educational processes which have local, regional, national and international expressions. Although our paper has been on degree or whole-programme mobility, there is considerable consistency with findings from earlier research on UK students' experiences, patterns and attitudes towards credit mobility, especially with regard to geographical destinations (less to Europe, more to the USA and other Anglophone destinations), and to factors of social and financial background (Findlay et al. 2006).

The key results of the present paper have been set out in the seven tables and their associated commentaries. In this concluding narrative we reflect on these findings through the wider theoretical frames we introduced earlier in the paper.

First, surveying 17 and 18 year-old sixth-formers would appear to be some way removed from the theoretical framing of ISM within a globalised highly-skilled labour market, but the linkage is nevertheless clear, nowhere more so than in the case of the non-UK students in English boarding schools who have, in most cases, already taken the first step along this path. For the UK-national pupils who are the vast majority of our respondents, applying to study abroad is an initial indication of an international perspective on their future life-course and career. What is much more abundantly clear is that this international outlook, for the time being, is oriented in one linguistic direction: the Anglophone destinations of the

USA, Canada, Australia and Ireland, which between them account for more than four out of five respondents who consider the study-abroad option. What we are not picking up are the future 'Eurostars' (Favell 2008) or 'pioneers of European integration' (Recchi and Favell 2009) – the graduate professionals, mobile and multilingual, who are the protagonists of the 'new Europe'; perhaps they identify themselves only later, after their degrees including modern European languages and an Erasmus year abroad.

Second, our study can be incipiently connected to literatures about globalisation and its educational counterpart. ISM is just one of many mobilities which interconnect our globalising world; the overall pattern, from the UK perspective, is an increasing share of inward mobility from high-fee-paying overseas (i.e. non-EU) countries, yet a decreasing share of global outward mobility. This asymmetry arguably has an equally unbalanced impact on the UK's participation in the new global knowledge economy: the market pay-off of large numbers of overseas students eager to access British (and other 'Western') high-prestige universities and thence to enter the increasingly anglophone global labour market for specialised graduates may entail the sacrifice of a diminishing proportion of UK graduates who are internationally educated, multilingual, and interculturally aware. Plenty of statistical evidence exists to show that the UK has lower rates of outward mobility, at least compared to other European countries – but not compared to the US and Australia, which have even lower rates (see HEFCE 2004: 12-13, 74-80). Brooks and Waters (2009a: 193-194) suggest that UK students' interest in overseas study, especially at prestigious universities such as Harvard, may be increasing.

Whilst globalisation sets the general context for the internationalisation of HE and ISM (Altbach and Knight 2007; de Wit 2008c; Gürüz 2008; Varghese 2008), it also seems to have the effect of sharpening the (perceived) differences in quality and prestige between national HE systems, and between individual universities within them. Increased information about universities and the reputations of their research centres and teaching programmes, nowadays codified in national and international rankings which are widely available, sets up a global hierarchy of universities in which few are in doubt as to which are at the top (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Oxford, Cambridge, LSE etc.).

Third, we can try to interpret our results through the lens of the 'youth mobility cultures' paradigm whereby spatial mobility is linked primarily to the adventure and excitement of the rite of passage to adulthood, and only secondarily (if at all) to career

planning. We saw that half of the respondents to the Student Survey, administered in several countries abroad, saw study abroad primarily as a 'unique adventure', and 88 per cent said this factor was at least of some importance in their move. Even so, some respondents in the Student Survey also saw the experiential side of overseas study as something which could 'make a difference' and 'give them the edge' in the job stakes – for instance, by making them 'more interesting' in a competitive interview situation (Findlay and King 2010: 30-31). In Brooks and Waters' programme of research we observe an interesting contrast between, on the one hand, the results of their recent work on British students abroad, who are there largely as adventure-seekers and also in order to develop and prolong a carefree student lifestyle (Waters and Brooks 2010) and, on the other hand, Waters' earlier research on Hong Kong Chinese students, whose motivations to study abroad are much more clearly strategised towards career development, learning English and developing professional and intercultural skills to be deployed in the business world (Waters 2006, 2009).

Although our School Survey data – by their very nature (questionnaire results, pre-university age) – give only an inkling of this, we can foresee some of our respondents, and most of all the non-UK-nationals, as heading along the mobility track. For this group, mobility is already part of their habitus – their parents live abroad, they are frequent travellers, and they speak at least two languages fluently. Whether they become Eurostars à la Favell (2008) or 'global stars' with their future careers spanning other key nodes of the global economy remains to be seen. But this (potentially) mobile elite is only a tiny minority in our survey. Let us not forget the other side of the coin: the increasing number of British students, many of 'non-traditional' background (i.e. of working-class parentage, from ethnic minorities, of mature age, and with disabilities), who have little choice but to live at home (Christie 2007; Holdsworth 2009). For them going abroad is only a dream or not even that. This leads to our final perspective.

We believe our School Survey data are a clear vindication of the perpetuations and transmission of social class divisions. We see a nexus of overlapping dimensions of privilege interacting and reinforcing each other in our tabulated results: North vs. South, state vs. independent schools, university-educated vs. non-university educated parents, high vs. low socio-occupational status. These patterns in the response data link to academic performance and personal mobility and network factors which directly shape decisions and thoughts about studying abroad. In sum, the socially more powerful groups in British society – the aristocracy, the upwardly-mobile professional and managerial classes – see international

mobility as a way of strategising to enhance the educational capital of their young people beyond the national to the global, especially if the destination is a world-class university which ranks alongside Oxbridge.

This diagnosis is consistent with more qualitative research on British students at foreign universities carried out by Brooks and Waters (2009a, 2009b; also Waters and Brooks 2010). Buoyed up financially by their families, these internationally oriented students – often strongly guided by their parents in a 'parentocracy' of higher education (cf. Brown 1997) – are concerned to acquire the 'right' credentials and other embodied life and travel experiences, which are subsequently converted into social status and economic capital. In this way, and following Bourdieu's (1986) well-known analysis, students who go to study abroad, especially if they attend high-prestige institutions, accumulate multiple, mutually-reinforcing forms of capital: mobility capital (different experiences of travel and living abroad built up over time), human capital (a world-class education), social capital (access to networks, 'connections'), cultural capital (languages, intercultural awareness) and eventually economic capital (high-income employment). And yet, beyond this, there is something of an extra dimension to the UK case, based partly on the position of the country in the global HE system (and its 'command' of the global language), but probably more particularly on the British (especially English) class system and the way that, more than most other advanced countries, educational privilege is reproduced and even entrenched through the state vs. private educational divide. ISM adds another layer of privileged access to this polarised system.

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[1] Research for this project was conducted over the 18 months March 2008 to August 2009 and involved collaboration between two research teams, one at the University of Dundee (Centre for Applied Population Analysis) and one at the University of Sussex (Sussex Centre for Migration Research). See Findlay and King (2010) for the synthesis report on this research.

[2] For a diverse selection of studies on Erasmus mobility see Commission of the European Communities (2000), Findlay et al. (2006), King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), Maiworm and Teichler (1996), Murphy-Lejeune (2003).

[3] Amongst the many problems of achieving comparable statistics on ISM is the critical issue of definitional criteria (domicile, citizenship, prior residence/education etc.); see Findlay and King (2010: 10-16, 68-71). Generally such statistics exclude – although one can never be sure of this – short-term, credit-mobility visiting and exchange students.

[4] We were not alone in being surprised at the existence of this partially 'hidden' population of foreign students in UK schools. A recent *Times Higher Education* article commented on the discrepancy between estimates of overseas students in British universities according to whether the students are classified by nationality (513,570 in 2007-08) or by domicile when applying (389,330). The inference is that nearly a quarter of overseas students apply from a UK domicile – as boarders or whilst attending a UK language or foundation course (Gill 2009). From our interviews and school visits we found that such students mainly came from the Far East (China, Korea, Japan, Singapore), from populous European countries (Russia, Ukraine, Germany), from Arab oil countries, and from Nigeria. They remain a partly hidden group because most are boarders at prestigious independent schools and hence are invisible to the wider society.

[5] This assumes that the combination of Brighton/Sussex and Leicester(shire) is a reasonably accurate representation of the English Year 13 school population.

[6] The 'total' figures on Table 2 (147 for the narrow sample, 211 for the standard one) are lower than those on Table 1 (204 and 283) because many respondents who had thought of going abroad did not specify any destination country.

[7] We acknowledge potential problems with predicted A-level grades. Students may not have seen their competed UCAS forms or might not have been told of their predicted grades by their tutors. It is also possible that schools vary in the accuracy or optimism with which they make predictions. Sample numbers are reduced where respondents did not know their A-level predicted grades or were following another programme such as the international baccalaureate (IB).

[8] Some explanation for those not familiar with the UK university and UCAS systems. The UCAS form allows up to five unranked choices of HEIs for applications. Applicants with high aspirations are likely to apply to the top universities in the UK. According to the 2008 World University Ranking list (published in the *Times Higher Education*, 9 October 2008, i.e. as we started the School Survey), the top ten UK universities were Cambridge, Oxford, Imperial, UCL, King's, Edinburgh, Manchester, Bristol, LSE and Warwick.

[9] In one sense, this is a reasonable option since there are many universities within commuting distance – two in Leicester, two in Nottingham, Loughborough, Coventry, Warwick, Derby, etc.

[10] A further complication arose when coding the questionnaire responses to this item. Although respondents were asked to give both father's and mother's occupational status (including housewife/husband etc.), an unexpectedly large number checked the answer for only one parent. Whether this was because these pupils were all from single-parent families, or if there was some other reason, we do not know. In order to standardise the results, we took the 'highest' occupation category indicated by each respondent.

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Table 1. Answers to the question 'Have you thought about applying to a non-UK university?' by area and type of school.

	Standard Sample		Narrow Sample	
	no.	%	no.	%
Leicester Schools				
Yes, and applying	34	4.9	19	3.0
Yes, but not applying	78	11.1	69	10.8
Both answers	112	16.0	88	13.8
Sussex Schools				
Yes, and applying	67	9.6	31	5.1
Yes, but not applying	104	14.7	85	14.1
Both answers	171	24.3	116	19.2
State Schools				
Yes, and applying	20	2.9	18	2.8
Yes, but not applying	73	10.4	67	10.2
Both answers	93	13.3	85	13.0
Independent Schools				
Yes, and applying	81	11.6	32	5.5
Yes, but not applying	109	15.6	87	14.9
Both answers	190	27.1	119	20.3
Total				
Yes, and applying	101	7.2	50	4.0
Yes, but not applying	182	13.0	154	12.4
Both answers	283	20.2	204	16.4

Note: For definitions of standard and narrow samples, see text.
Source: Authors' School Survey 2008-09.

Table 2. Destinations for those who are applying, or considered applying, abroad

	Standard Sample		Narrow Sample	
	no.	%	no.	%
France	8	3.8	7	4.8
Germany	9	4.3	2	1.4
Ireland	17	8.1	17	11.6
Other Europe	13	6.2	6	4.1
Europe	47	22.3	32	21.8
USA	89	42.2	75	51.0
Canada	11	5.2	8	5.4
North America	100	47.4	83	56.5
Australia	21	10.0	20	13.6
Latin America, Caribbean	6	2.8	5	3.4
East Asia	28	13.3	2	1.4
Other	9	4.3	5	3.4
Total	211	100.0	147	100.0

Notes: 'Other Europe' includes some students applying to Charles University in Prague; in the category 'Latin America, Caribbean' are some students applying to St. George's, Grenada; both usually for Medicine. Percentages may not tally due to rounding.
Source: Authors' School Survey 2008-09.

Table 3. Applying to university abroad by academic performance.

	Standard sample			Narrow sample		
	Applying	(%)	Not applying	Applying	(%)	Not applying
A-levels						
3 As or better	49	(10.1)	437	27	(6.4)	398
3 Bs or better	11	(3.7)	288	4	(1.5)	271
Less	25	(5.8)	409	13	(3.4)	373
GCSEs						
7+ at A or A*	36	(6.9)	483	25	(5.2)	460
7+ at A or B	12	(2.8)	415	9	(2.2)	395
Less	8	(2.6)	300	7	(2.5)	271

Chi-square test results (all df 2): A-levels standard sample 13.229, $p < .001$; A-levels narrow sample 11.026, $p < .01$; GSCEs standard sample 12.689, $p < .002$; GCSEs narrow sample 6.637, $p < .05$.
Source: Authors' School Survey 2008-09.

Table 4. Applying to university abroad by quality of UK universities applied for.

Applied to 3 or more top-10 UK universities	Standard sample			Narrow sample		
	Applying	(%)	Not applying	Applying	(%)	Not applying
Yes	27	(17.1)	131	10	(8.4)	109
No	51	(5.1)	946	30	(3.3)	876

Chi-square test results (df 1): standard sample 31.049, p< .001; narrow sample 7.273, p< .01.
Source: Authors' School Survey 2008-09.

Table 5. Applying to university abroad by parental education and occupation

	Standard sample			Narrow sample		
	Applying	(%)	Not applying	Applying	(%)	Not applying
Parents university-educated?						
Both of them	46	(10.4)	397	22	(6.0)	348
One of them	25	(6.9)	268	14	(4.2)	318
Neither	28	(5.1)	522	14	(2.8)	487
Parents' occupational class						
Manager, director	47	(10.1)	418	21	(5.3)	376
Professional, teacher	30	(6.5)	431	16	(3.8)	405
Clerical, sales, manual, other	23	(5.4)	406	13	(3.4)	369

Chi-square test results (all df 2): parents' education, standard sample 10.045, $p < .01$; narrow sample not significant; parents' occupation 8.132, $p < .05$; narrow sample not significant.

Source: Authors' School Survey 2008-09.

Table 6. Answers to the question 'Have you thought about applying to a non-UK university?' by various personal, family and network factors: standard sample (narrow sample in brackets)

	Yes and applying			Yes, not applying			No	
	no.		%	no.		%	no.	%
Have your parents lived outside the UK for >6 months?								
Yes	75	(32)	9.8	98	(76)	12.8	592	77.4
No	26	(18)	4.3	81	(75)	13.4	499	82.3
No. of countries visited on family holidays outside UK								
7+	30	(15)	8.5	63	(54)	17.9	258	73.5
2-6	38	(23)	5.8	77	(69)	11.8	536	82.3
0-1	9	(4)	4.8	20	(14)	10.8	157	84.4
Do you know anyone studying or who has studied at a non-UK university?								
Yes	92	(42)	16.5	101	(75)	18.1	366	65.5
No	8	(8)	1.0	80	(78)	9.9	723	89.1
Have you been on a school trip to another country?								
Yes	46	(27)	8.9	86	(76)	16.6	387	74.6
No	45	(20)	5.4	89	(74)	10.7	695	83.8
Have your school staff provided information about non-UK universities?								
Yes	56	(21)	11.8	76	(66)	16.0	344	72.3
No	43	(29)	4.9	100	(85)	11.4	733	83.7

Source: Authors' School Survey 2008-09